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Headline news for busy
church editors

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Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

A CHRISTMAS GIFT DELIVERED WITH A NEEDLE – Santa Claus couldn't make it to Haiti, India and several African countries with \$4.7 million worth of donated Hepatitis B vaccine and syringes. So the United Church of Christ stepped in. Funds from "One Great Hour of Sharing" were used to pay shipping costs to Haiti and India. The vaccine had been donated to Interchurch Medical Assistance, an ecumenical organization that distributes medical supplies overseas. "We were delighted to have the opportunity to participate in a cooperative effort to get this critical vaccine to those who need it most," says the Rev. Linda Petrucelli, secretary for global sharing of resources for the United Church Board for World Ministries.

CAN I QUOTE YOU? – "When people ask about whether that ten percent should come from gross or net income, I think: 'Why am I going to shortchange God? It's God's money, so I'm going to immediately go for the larger amount.'"

– Richard N. Johnson, member of
Amistad UCC, Marietta, Ga., on why he tithes,
as quoted in *Connections*, the new
UCC Stewardship Council publication

DON'T MESS WITH GOD'S COUNTRY – The State of Utah has some pretty spectacular scenery, and some UCC ministers in the Great Salt Lake State feel very strongly about anything that might upset God's handiwork. Nine UCC clergy – that's just about every one of our pastors in the state – have protested to Congress about two so-called "Utah wilderness bills," HR 1745 and S. 884, that would open up for development land not specifically designated as wilderness.

"To not preserve enough of God's creation in its wild state, or provide the habitat necessary for survival of all God's creatures, would be to sin against our own children and future generations," the clergy wrote.

The clergy writers also say they are concerned about the implication for both biological diversity and the rights of future generations. And this is in a state where in many places, there are only a few people per square mile.

NO TIME TO LOSE OUR COMPASSION – When an arsonist torched a popular restaurant owned by Iranian immigrants and one of the owners was found bound and gagged, normally placid Fargo, N.D., discovered it had a hate crime on its hands. A shocked public quickly reacted. Organized by **First Congregational UCC**, some 800 neighbors and supporters marched on the burned out eatery in support of the family.

"We pledge ourselves to never allow this type of hatred to have life in our lives, or to allow it to be communicated in our presence," vowed the Rev. Nelson Stone, pastor of First Congregational. "No longer will we be silent."

Then the second bombshell burst. The police charged one of the owners, the one tied up, with arson. Confronted, she confessed and was arrested. Then, recounts Stone, the most amazing thing happened.

Although \$8,000 had already been collected, "Folks didn't think they'd been had, and no one asked for their money back." Rather, townspeople, while greatly relieved that there had been no hate crime, had now become alerted to the possibility of some future incident. "We are a community of compassion," says Stone, "and this is not a time to lose our compassion." His church is planning an ethnic Thanksgiving for 1996, to be an annual celebration of different heritages and cultures.

AND THE WINNER IS . . . – Only one American was among the winners of the prestigious Reebok 1995 Human Rights Award. She's Angela Elizabeth Brown, a young African-American UCC lay minister who works for Greenpeace on environmental justice issues. She was honored by the British sports shoe manufacturer for organizing young people in the South to resist toxic dumps that are sited in poor, mostly black communities where political resistance to the polluters is weak.

Brown first learned about environmental racism as a teenager at a demonstration in 1982 in Warren County, N.C., protesting a proposed toxic dump there. That protest, the first of its type in the country, was organized by the UCC's Commission for Racial Justice. Brown is assistant pastor of **St. Delight UCC, Louisville, N.C.** The award recognizes young people 30 and under on the front lines of human rights work and carries a cash prize of \$25,000 to a human rights organization designated by each recipient.

THIS ISSUE BROUGHT TO YOU BY . . . – You buy memorial poinsettias at Christmas and lilies at Easter. So, why not a memorial ad in your church newsletter? It helps pay production and mailing costs and reminds the entire church family of your memory of a loved one. **First Congregational UCC, Bay Shore, N.Y.**, allows members to sponsor an entire issue of its newsletter for the \$27 postage cost. A discreet notice on the back page says "This issue of *The Lamplighter* is given in loving memory of . . ."

Keeping You Posted is edited by William C. Winslow and produced monthly by the UCC Office of Communication, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115-1100.

Send story ideas to: William C. Winslow, UCC Office of Communication, 475 Riverside Dr., 16th fl., New York, NY 10115.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS – Readers of some U.S. newspapers were jolted recently by the following lead in a story. "The United Church of Christ has revamped God in its hymnals: God is no longer master, is seldom Lord and also is both father and mother." Provocative? Yes. Accurate? No. The Associated Press story was wrong, and the UCC Office of Communication, which considers the press its ally in telling the denomination's story, asked for a clarification. The AP agreed its story was in error and graciously moved a more accurate version which said that *The New Century Hymnal* affirms the basic faith of the UCC but uses both new and old language to express that faith. It goes on to say the United Church believes that Jesus Christ is Lord. The hymnal does not revise the core theological truths revealed in the Bible, although it strongly affirms that all people – including women and men – are created in the image and likeness of God.

KYP editor's comment: Hey! It's a great hymnal. Give it a trial sing if you haven't already.

PEACE IN OUR TIME? – In a pastoral letter to members, the Rev. Paul H. Sherry, UCC president, urged the participation of the U.S. military in the Bosnian peace keeping force under NATO command.

"The U.S.' leadership role in the world today places it in the moral responsibility to use its power positively toward the achievement of peace," he said in support of the recently reached Dayton peace accord. He noted such involvement was in America's interest for "the establishment of a positive precedent for the resolution of disputes elsewhere by negotiation rather than by force." Co-signing with Sherry was the Rev. Richard L. Hamm, general minister and president of the UCC's ecumenical partner, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

SO MANY HUGS AND TEARS – After 20 years of murderous civil war, leaving a legacy of landmines, broken bodies and bombed out buildings, peace has finally settled on Angola. Surprisingly, during those terrible times, the **Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola** not only managed to survive but to grow. The faith of the members and their leaders had been "toughened in the fires of colonialism," explains Joyce Myers-Brown. A former UCC missionary there, she recently returned for a joyous but tearful reunion with old friends and colleagues. The church is alive and well, she discovered.

"In the darkest times, people found God," she says, even though the war split the church geographically. Congregants have increased from 500,000 to estimated 700,000. The church was founded in 1880 by Congregational missionaries. Although Catholics were favored by the Portuguese colonial government, all three leaders in the war for independence were mission educated.

DID YOU KNOW? – Of religious variables, people who give at least \$500 to their local church are motivated first by church attendance, followed by having heard a stewardship sermon, participation in church school classes and membership in a fellowship group.

– Quoted in *Connections*, the new UCC Stewardship Council publication